

The Roma community

RECOGNITION OF THE ROMA MINORITY

2006 has been an important year for the Roma community in Spain, one in which some of the aspirations which the associative movement has been pursuing for years have come to fruition.

At the beginning of April on the occasion of International Roma Day, the Ministry of Culture announced the creation of the Roma Cultural Institute, now awaiting approval by the Cabinet. This is a momentous decision which, to a certain extent, makes reparation for one of the areas of exclusion to which the Roma community has been subject. It is a clear acknowledgement of the contribution made by Roma to Spanish culture and society which has too often been overlooked and which deserves to be highlighted through suitable institutional action.

A few weeks later, on 29 June in Madrid, the Secretariat of State for Social Services, Families and Disability, Amparo Varcacoe, chaired the opening session of the first State Council of the Roma People, a body allowing for the formal participation and collaboration of organisations related with the Roma community. The Council is an institutional forum fostering more active policies whose purpose is to promote the social incorporation and equal opportunity of the most disadvantaged Roma people and an advisory body where the Administration and organisations defending and promoting the rights of the Roma minority are represented. This is a clear opportunity to strengthen the participation of the Roma associative movement

which, in contrast with other sectors, has traditionally been noted for its dispersion and weakness.

Also of enormous importance is the fact that the Roma community is being acknowledged in the reform of the Statutes of Autonomy of some of the Autonomous Communities commencing this process in 2006 (Catalonia and Andalusia) or which are currently immersed in the reform process (Castilla and Leon, Castilla-La Mancha and Aragon). In the case of Andalusia, the text approved by the Congress of Deputies on 2 November includes a mention of the Roma community in Article 10, paragraph 3.21. In the Statute of Catalonia, which was approved by referendum, an expressed reference to the Roma community is likewise made in its Article 42. This expressed acknowledgement of the reality of the Roma people by the regional (autonomous) governments of Spain in their most fundamental law and their place amongst the citizenry, in a certain sense settles the debt which the institutions have had with the Roma community and stresses a commitment to equality.

Also within the framework of the actions taking place at regional level, we would stress the presentation of the Integral Plan of the Roma People of Catalonia, following in the wake of Andalusia and the Basque Country which also have specific integral plans for the Roma community. For its part the Town Hall of Palencia, in collaboration with different social entities working in that provincial capital

including the FSG, presented its Municipal Plan for the Roma Ethnic Minority for the period 2006-2009 which renews the former Plan's (2000-2003) will to involve the community itself in the search for responses while steering clear of paternalism and with a clear accent on education, enhanced autonomy and responsibility.

Of a different nature but equally significant were the April 8th celebrations of International Roma Day. These festivities are becoming increasingly popular and are supported by the participation of the local authorities in the cities where they are held. This celebration is not only receiving greater institutional support with each passing year but has also attracted the attention of other social entities, the media and the civil society in general. Special mention should also be made of the support these festivities received in 2006 from the ONCE Foundation which dedicated its Cuponazo lottery drawing of Friday 31 March to its dissemination and visibility.

And lastly, we should also mention that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has entrusted the Sociological Research Centre to conduct what will be the first Socio-demographic

study of the Roma community in Spain. This is in response to the need for reliable data whereby to identify and quantify inequalities and guide the administrations in their development of social inclusion schemes.

All of this highlights the trend which we have been pointing to over the last several years towards greater awareness and commitment on the part of the institutions and public authorities as concerns the situation of Roma, and not only having regard to their social situation but also in terms of the priority that these initiatives put on the importance that recognition of their cultural identity has for the definitive incorporation of the Roma minority in society.

Also, the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities made a visit to Spain to compile its final report on the subject due to be published in 2007 and featuring information and analysis on the situation of minorities in Spain with a very special emphasis on the Roma minority and taking specific interest in the latter's participation and representation in public life, the institutions, the defence and advancement of its culture and its standard of living.

THE SOCIAL SITUATION

Insofar as headway is being made in terms of institutional recognition and in tune with the bright economic conditions prevailing in our country, the living standards of Spanish Roma are also improving but at a slower pace than for the rest of the society. However, as we have been stressing year after year in this Annual Report, much work still needs to be done in terms of promoting equal opportunity and equal treatment and the eradication of discrimination.



PRESENTATION OF THE ROMA CULTURAL INSTITUTE



CONSTITUTIVE ACT OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE ROMA PEOPLE

● As illustrated in the study Roma population and employment, in **the field of employment** the gap between Roma and the rest of the population is huge: four percentage points higher unemployment; less than 50% of employed persons are salaried workers; more than double the rate of short-term contracts vis-à-vis the rest of the Spanish salaried workers; 25% working in non-regulated activities with no social protection and, worst of all, unsustainable levels of training and qualification where 70% of those over the age of 16 have not completed their primary school studies.

● **Education** is another of the key areas related to equal opportunity where expected progress is not taking place. The data revealed in the educational study compiled in 2006 entitled Access of Roma students to compulsory education (FSG), highlight the serious weaknesses and the huge gap that must be covered before one can talk about “educational mainstreaming”. This study warns of the high dropout rate which, at the secondary school level, is as high as 80% of the already low number of students who even enrol. These situations must be amended but this will only happen with a more concerted effort on the part of educational authorities and school teachers; and of course Roma families themselves must also make a firmer commitment to keep their children from dropping out of the educational system.

● In **the area of health**, we would draw attention to the initiative taken by the Ministry of Health which, in collaboration with the FSG, commissioned a study this year on the health conditions of the Roma community based on the variables of the National Health Survey and, when the results are released, will shed light on the health situation of the Roma population, identify key factors and allow for the drawing of comparisons with the rest of the population.

● **The housing situation** is another of the aspects where the conditions of Roma families have improved significantly. Despite this fact, however, we estimate that between 7% and 10% of the Roma population still lives in sub-standard housing often segregated from urban centres. The eradication of shanty towns is still a pending task and despite actions implemented by some Town Halls (in 2006 Avilés completed its eradication scheme) and Autonomous Communities, the housing situation prevailing today and the lack of a decided sub-standard housing eradication policy, unfortunately gives us reason to believe that shanty towns will be with us for several years to come as will the related erosion of the fundamental rights of the families living in these environments. In order to gain greater insight into the real situation facing Roma families in this connection, we welcome initiatives such as *the Special report by the Andalusian Parliament on shanty towns in Andalusia* compiled by the Andalusian Ombudsman.

EQUAL TREATMENT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The issue of equal treatment and non-discrimination is key to the full social incorporation of the Roma community, but is one of the areas where the least headway has been made in practice. The transposition of Directive 2000/43 into our legal system in 2003 calling for the creation of an independent body promoting equal treatment and providing, inter alia, assistance to victims of discrimination, has still not had any tangible outcomes after three years. The Directorate-General for the Integration of Immigrants in charge of fostering equal treatment policies has announced the forthcoming presentation of a Royal Decree for the creation of a Council to promote equal treatment which we hope will assume these functions.

In its third Report on Spain published in February, the ECRI (the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) recognises that steps have been taken in the right direction but that there is still reason for alarm in view of the discrimination suffered by Spain's Roma community. The 2006 report published by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) takes a similar stance in reference to Spain and the Roma community.

THE ROMA MINORITY IN EUROPE

Given their demographic significance in Europe, Roma continue to have an important place on the agenda of international

organisations and European institutions. The poverty still prevailing in the case of many Roma families is of concern, as is the widespread social exclusion, rejection and discrimination suffered by this minority in Europe.

Within the framework of the European Union (EU) where there are now greater numbers of Roma following the enlargement towards the Eastern European countries, different initiatives were implemented in 2006 to supplement the already existing policy measures, regulatory advances and resource allocation. Mention should likewise be made of the implementation of a high-level think-tank comprised of ten experts to advise the European Commission on the subject of the social inclusion of ethnic minorities; one of those ten members is the former director of this Foundation, José Manuel Fresno.

At the beginning of the year, the Commission created a web page called "The EU and Roma" featuring the latest information on legislation, reports, publications and project funding and includes links to other websites and a list of contacts related to this subject.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism

and Xenophobia (EUMC) published an interesting report on The Roma population and education in the EU denouncing the systematic discrimination and exclusion suffered by Roma students in many educational



SIGN ANNOUNCING THE APRIL 8TH CELEBRATION OF "INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY"

systems. Although the necessary legal and political instruments are in place, the report points out that measures must be taken to prevent segregation in schools and to promote the permanence of Roma students during the entire course of the educational cycle.

There can be no doubt, however, that the 2007-2013 period of Structural Funds was the most important focal point of work in 2006 and will have the greatest impact on the Roma community. Structural Funds comprise the main funding instrument focusing on the promotion of social cohesion and it is therefore important for EU Member States to include actions designed to improve the social inclusion of the Roma population in their respective Operational Programmes. To promote these actions and as evidence of the interest in this subject, the European Commission and some Member States held a number of seminars and meetings during the course of 2006 on the use of Structural Funds targeting the Roma community.

For its part, the European Parliament also included the Roma minority on its institutional agenda. Among other initiatives, it held a public audience at its headquarters on the role of the media as concerns the Roma community; it submitted a report on Roma women and appointed the dancer Joaquín Cortés as Ambassador of Roma Rights.

Outside of the European Union, mention must be made of initiatives such as the Educational Fund within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion which, over and above this year's short-term results, is proving its value in gaining the commitment of governments in the implementation of the inclusion schemes they have drawn up.

We would also stress the activities undertaken by the Council of Europe, an institution traditionally committed to the Roma community. In February, the Human Rights Commissioner submitted its Final report on the human rights situation of the Roma denouncing the obstacles faced by the Roma community in fully enjoying their rights and presenting a series of recommendations and proposals in the spheres of discrimination in access to housing, education, employment, etc.

Also within the framework of the Council of Europe, we should mention the launching of an awareness-raising campaign entitled DOSTA! (Enough! in Romany) and using the slogan "There is nothing scary about Roma except your prejudices", disseminated mostly in the area of the Balkans.



LOGO OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S
AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN